IN THE CLAIMS

The status of claims in this application is as follows (with the changes made herein identified):

SUB B17

1. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said image ~~management and~~ search apparatus comprising:

input means for inputting search terms;

~~storage means storing said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;~~

search means for searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input means; and

rearranging means for rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means according to ~~said~~ importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched.

AM

2. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when said rearranging means rearranges the images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means according to said importance, said rearranging means regards standard importance of a default or said importance as priority ~~in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and said rearranging means regards said importance as priority in a case where said importance is stored in said storage means~~, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

3. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said image ~~management and~~ search apparatus comprising:

input means for inputting search terms;

~~storage means storing said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;~~

search means for searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to images to be searched or keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input means; and

rearranging means for rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means according to ~~said~~ importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords.

4. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search apparatus according to claim 3, wherein when said rearranging means rearranges the images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means according to said importance and said closeness in meaning, said rearranging means calculates priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with no importance or in a line with relevant importance in a preset priority formula matrix ~~in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and said rearranging means calculates priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with relevant importance in said priority formula matrix in a case where said importance is stored in said storage means~~, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

5. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said priority formula matrix is constructed in a manner such that said importance and said accordance are arranged correspondingly to one other in a form of a matrix, said rearranging means regarding said importance plus said accordance as priority if said accordance is not less than a predetermined threshold level, and regarding said accordance as priority if said accordance is less than said threshold level.

6. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search apparatus according to any of claims 1 through 5, wherein said image ~~management and~~ search apparatus is provided in a server of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said input means receiving search terms inputted by a client of said information retrieval system on the Internet, said search means searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms, said rearranging means rearranging images corresponding to keywords searched by said search means according to said importance, and said image ~~management and~~ search apparatus returning the rearranged images in a predetermined format such as HTML and XML to said client.

7. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search method applied to an image ~~management and~~ search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said image ~~management and~~ search method comprising:

an input step of inputting search terms;

~~a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;~~

a searching step of searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input steps; and

a rearranging step of rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step according to ~~said~~ importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched.

8. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search method according to claim 7, wherein when the images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means are rearranged according to said importance, said rearranging step comprises regarding standard importance of a default or said importance as priority ~~in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and regarding said importance as priority in a case where said~~

~~importance is stored in said storage means~~, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

9. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search method applied to an image ~~management and~~ search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said image ~~management and~~ search method comprising:

an input step of inputting search terms;

~~a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;~~

a searching step of searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to said images to be searched or keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input step; and

a rearranging step of rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step according to ~~said~~ importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords.

10. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search method according to claim 9, wherein when the images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step are rearranged according to said importance and said closeness in meaning, said rearranging step comprises calculating priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with no importance or with relevant importance in a preset priority formula matrix ~~in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and calculating priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with relevant importance in said priority formula matrix in a case where said importance is stored in said storage means~~, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

11. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search method according to claim 10, wherein said priority formula matrix is constructed in a manner such that said importance and

said accordance are arranged correspondingly to one other in a form of a matrix, said rearranging step comprising regarding said importance plus said accordance as priority if said accordance is not less than a predetermined threshold level, and regarding said accordance as priority if said accordance is less than said threshold level.

12. (Currently Amended) An image ~~management and~~ search method according to any of claims 7 through 11, wherein said input step comprises receiving search terms inputted by a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said searching step comprising searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms, said rearranging step comprising rearranging images corresponding to keywords searched by said searching step according to said importance, and the rearranged images being returned in a predetermined format such as HTML and XML to said client.

13. (Currently Amended) A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image ~~management and~~ search ~~method~~ applied to an image ~~management and~~ search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said ~~image management and search method~~storage medium comprising instructions for:

~~an input step of~~ inputting search terms;

~~a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;~~

~~a searching step of~~ searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input step; and

~~a rearranging step of~~ rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step according to ~~said~~ importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched.

14. (Currently Amended) A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein when the images corresponding to the keywords searched ~~by said search means~~ are rearranged according to said

importance, said rearranging ~~step~~instruction comprises regarding standard importance of a default or said importance as priority ~~in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and regarding said importance as priority in a case where said importance is stored in said storage means~~, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

15. (Currently Amended) A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image ~~management and~~ search ~~method~~ applied to an image ~~management and~~ search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said ~~image management and search method~~storage medium comprising instructions for:

~~an input step of~~ inputting search terms;

~~a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;~~

~~a searching step of~~ searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to images to be searched or keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input step; and

~~a rearranging step of~~ rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step according to ~~said~~ importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords.

16. (Currently Amended) A storage medium according to claim 15, wherein when the images corresponding to the keywords searched ~~by said searching step~~ are rearranged according to said importance and said closeness in meaning, said rearranging ~~step~~instruction comprises calculating priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with no importance or with relevant importance in a preset priority formula matrix ~~in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and calculating priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with relevant importance in said priority formula matrix in a case where said~~

~~importance is stored in said storage means~~, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

17. (Original) A storage medium according to claim 16, wherein said priority formula matrix is constructed in a manner such that said importance and said accordance are arranged correspondingly to one other in a form of a matrix, said rearranging step comprising regarding said importance plus said accordance as priority if said accordance is not less than a predetermined threshold level, and regarding said accordance as priority if said accordance is less than said threshold level.

A2

18. (Currently Amended) A storage medium according to any of claims 13 through 17, wherein said input ~~step~~instruction comprises receiving search terms inputted by a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said searching ~~step~~instruction comprising searching ~~said storage means~~ for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms, said rearranging ~~step~~instruction comprising rearranging images corresponding to keywords searched by said searching ~~step~~instruction according to said importance, and the rearranged images being returned in a predetermined format such as HTML and XML to said client.